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ABSTRACT

This document provides a summary of school-reform actions taken by each of the 50 states and Puerto Rico as of February 12, 1996. Reform refers to four broad categories--school choice, services that are contracted out to private entities, deregulation or decentralization (for example, charter schools), and accountability through strong academic standards and assessment mechanisms. Data show that 16 states permit statewide public school choice; 13 states have ongoing public school choice within some or all school districts; 11 states have charter schools that offer real autonomy; and 26 programs offer private-sector scholarships. Two communities and one state offer publicly sponsored full school choice. (LMI)

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SCHOOL REFORM IN THE UNITED STATES

STATE BY STATE SUMMARY

WINTER, 1996

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR SCHOOL REFORM

1995 was a year full of opportunity and promise for school children all across the country. As we begin the New Year, it is clear that Americans from all walks of life are working together to make their schools great.

While old news, the landslide election of November '94, which sent many new "reformers" of a variety of political leanings to govern in our cities, our state Capitols, and Washington DC, has continued to have an impact. The people have continued to speak in local and larger races: they want control back from the government, and they want to be involved in the critical decisions that affect not only their own livelihood, but that of their children as well. This was confirmed by the a Public Agenda survey, *Assignment Incomplete*, which found huge majorities of Americans dissatisfied with business as usual and intent upon changing it.

The good news is that they are well on their way to getting it. It is at the state level, especially, where educational reforms have been most embattled and most victorious, and where recently implemented policy has begun to reap rewards.

Dynamic education reformers in a majority of states have sent education reform to the head of the class, a priority that has yielded positive legislative and local action in at least two dozen states. From state legislatures to school boards, efforts are underway that are revolutionizing American education. And though some reforms continue to be thwarted by the political maneuvering of entrenched special interests, their arguments grow increasingly insupportable in the face of the continued academic weakness of too many of our nation's public schools.

Reforms come in a variety of shapes and sizes, tailored to the individual needs of each community. As you will see from this State-by-State Summary of School Reform, opportunities for improvements to the education system continue to grow, from setting up charter schools for homeless teens, to shoring up local control and accountability, to enacting standards that hold every child to her highest potential.

The Center for Education Reform is proud to have been involved in nearly every major state effort (and lots of small ones) during the last year. We provide guidance, assistance and ongoing consultation to reform leaders in at least half of the US.

For those of you who want to be more involved, it is as easy as a phone call. Just call us at The Center for Education Reform and we'll put you in touch with others who share your concern and energy. Our phone number is (800) 521-2118.

We look forward to working with you.

Jeanne Allen
President
February, 1996

DEFINING REFORM

The definition of 'school reform' varies greatly among individuals, the media and even education groups. There is consensus, however, that the word reform refers to more dramatic change in school systems than what can currently be achieved without legislation or structural policy changes. In most instances, fundamental school reform requires legislative or popular initiatives, or the approval of a governing authority. It varies depending upon the degree of control permitted to each governing body for education in a state. (A full discussion of such authority, and details about how to reform can be found in *The School Reform Handbook: "How to Improve Your Schools,"* available from The Center).

While many existing education groups use the term 'school reform' to refer to a hodgepodge of programs that they promote, the term really refers to concepts or proposals that institute fundamental change in a system. For the purposes of this analysis and to be consistent with popular sentiment, reform refers generally to four broad categories: school choice, contracting-out services to private entities, deregulation or decentralization (e.g. charter schools) and accountability through strong academic standards and assessment mechanisms.

Virtually every state in the nation allows some form of school choice to families, but the degree to which parents can choose varies greatly. Sixteen states currently have state-wide public school choice and another 13 offer public school choice only within districts or in selected areas. At least eight states offer post-secondary enrollment options. School choice programs that encompass choices among both public and private schools -- either through public funding or private scholarship programs -- are in effect in school districts in at least 18 states. Strong charter school legislation has been passed in eleven states. (Another nine states also have 'charter school' laws, but they don't provide for the autonomy and innovation that is essential to the charter concept.) Districts in virtually every state have taken advantage of private contracting to better manage administrative or special education services, and over 100,000 students in at least twelve states are educated in private schools under contract with a school, district, or the state. At least eight states have adopted new forms of testing to spur accountability.

The broad category "reformers" refers to those people or organizations who embrace wholesale change through one or more of these concepts. States poised to be most effective in the education reform arena are those that have a strong coalition of such reformers, including a bi-partisan group of state lawmakers, a grass roots coalition or an educational research group to provide critical information, some strong-minded community leaders, and vocal support among a broad cross section of the American public.

It is that formula that has brought successful measures to many communities. As you will see from what follows, reformers can no longer be pigeonholed, or dismissed as a small band of zealots. Reformers come in all shapes and sizes, are heavily comprised of educators and education leaders, and carry no political I.D.s. Here's what is happening in education reform, state by state, around the country, as of February 12, 1996.

SELECTED REFORMS AT-A-GLANCE

Public School Choice Permitted Throughout the State (16):

Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Idaho, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Tennessee, Utah, Washington.

Public School Choice Ongoing Within Some or All Districts (13):

Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas.

Charter School States That Offer Real Autonomy (11):

Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Texas.

Charter School States In Need of Improvement (9):

Alaska, Arkansas, Georgia, Hawaii, Kansas, New Mexico, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, Wyoming.

Private Sector Scholarship Programs (26):

Phoenix, AZ; Little Rock, AR; Los Angeles, CA; Oakland, CA; Denver, CO; Bridgeport, CT; Orlando, FL; Atlanta, GA; Indianapolis, IN; Battle Creek, MI; Grand Rapids, MI; Jackson, MS; Newark, NJ; Albany, NY, Buffalo, NY; New York City, NY; Washington Heights, NY; Knoxville, TN; Austin, TX, Dallas, TX; Houston, TX; Midland, TX; San Antonio, TX; Seattle, WA; Milwaukee, WI; Washington, DC.

Publicly-Sponsored Full School Choice (3)

Cleveland, OH; Milwaukee, WI; Vermont.

REFORM NATIONWIDE

ALABAMA

Business leaders and community activists have long been building public and legislative support for restoring local control to education and cutting back non-academic programs. In the education reform package passed in July, 1995, the state increased curriculum requirements and standardized assessment testing. Governor Fob James, a Republican, has pledged to eliminate unfunded mandates and return to a back-to-basics approach, and the state superintendent, Ed Richardson is working to restructure the State Department of Education into a service agency and away from its regulatory role. With the support of the Governor, the legislature passed a resolution in July to reject future Goals 2000 funds and returned the $1.5 million they received in 1995, a move challenged by Education Secretary Richard Riley.

ALASKA

Alaska passed a charter school law in 1995, but it contains none of the components for flexibility or autonomy that characterize the charter concept.

ARIZONA

- **Legislation Initiatives:** School choice was not a visible part of legislative efforts this past year, although a modest measure to provide full school choice to low-income children nearly passed in 1994. Nonetheless, a current law already provides for 2,000 children who do not benefit from their existing school to attend private education programs. Additionally, several thousand students are taking advantage of a new open-enrollment law to attend a public school outside their attendance zone.

- **State Superintendent Lisa Graham Keegan:** Reform-minded Keegan, having campaigned on a promise to improve the state's accountability mechanisms, halted the state's Arizona Student Assessment Program because it lacked any concrete measures for schools to judge student success. Keegan has undertaken to recreate the ASAP from scratch and will make the new assessment a barometer during school and an exit exam in the 12th grade. To address inequities in school financing, Keegan has proposed bypassing school districts and distributing education funds directly to schools based on their enrollment. Schools would contract for services with districts at their discretion.

- **Charter Schools:** In July, 1994, Arizona enacted one of the most far-reaching charter school laws to date. Within a year, the Board of Education and the State

Board for Charter Schools (established by the law as a separate charter-granting body), had approved nearly 50 applications, and 46 schools opened fall, 1995, with a total enrollment of more than 7,000 children. The charter movement has raised many issues for lawmakers, such as when Phoenix school officials refused to allow children to leave their current school to attend a charter, citing desegregation guidelines. The state has since given its go-ahead. Gov. Symington supports a US district court order to end the 10-year old desegregation plan on which the district spends $33 million annually and which impedes the freedom of families, many of them minority, to choose an alternative school.

The legislature appropriated $1 million to assist charter schools with start-up costs, providing about $20,000 to each. An additional 300 charter applications were already lined up for approval last year; the two state boards may approve up to 50 annually. There are no limits on district approvals; few have been approved.

- **Private Scholarships:** In Phoenix, the Arizona School Choice Trust, Inc., provides 50 children with privately funded scholarships of half-tuition to attend the school of their choice, up to $800. Seven-hundred students are on the waiting list.

ARKANSAS

Arkansas passed a charter school bill last year which, because it offers little departure from the current system, is unlikely to lead to innovation or improvement. The bill was backed by the Arkansas Education Association, a foe of releasing charters from collective bargaining requirements. The state does offer several other public school choice options to parents: a statewide open-enrollment measure, rarely publicized, serves a little over 1,000 students, and the state has about two dozen successful magnet and specialty programs that are oversubscribed and aggressively sought after by parents. Frustrated by the lack of high quality schools, a Little Rock businessman started the Free to Choose Trust to provide 300 low-income children with scholarships to attend private schools.

CALIFORNIA

- **Charter Schools:** In 1992, the state enacted a charter school law which permits up to 100 schools to open, the 100th was just approved in November. The State Board of Education has since approved schools beyond the cap that are waiting in the wings, thus lifting the 100 school cap. Currently about 90 charter schools are operating under the leadership of a wide variety of teachers, parents and communities. As one of the first laws enacted, it still contains a number of gray areas that have created roadblocks for school organizers. Friendly legislators are looking into ways to correct the law's deficiencies. Many successes are already on record: one school in the San Fernando Valley reported a $1.2 surplus in its first

year budget, which it used to hire more teachers and expand and improve facilities. Because charters are governed by performance contracts, they may be closed if there are severe problems, and one charter was revoked as the result of a financial audit.

- **Open Enrollment:** A state-wide open enrollment program to allow families some choice over public schools went into effect in September, 1994, and many schools immediately faced demand larger than supply allowed. In Los Angeles County alone, 22,000 seats were open, and parents were actively and eagerly seeking options in LA and other districts. In Simi Valley, for example, 20% to 25% of students chose a school other than their assigned one. And in Berkeley, nearly all parents were able to meet the choice deadline, partly as a result of the district's stepped up efforts to reach and involve parents.

  California sends between 10,000 and 15,000 students with difficult behavior to private schools.

- **Legislative Initiatives:** At both the legislative and grassroots levels a number of school choice efforts are being advanced despite the defeat of the school choice ballot initiative Proposition 174 in 1993. The American Education Reform Foundation is exploring an effort to get choice on the ballot in 1998. They are surveying voters as to school choice preferences. Another group is targeting an initiative for 1996, but lacks funding and organization. A proposal termed the "Education Freedom Initiative" was filed by C.A.R.E (Californians Advocating Reform in Education) in August. The proposal would seek to amend the California state constitution and use savings from sending public school students to private schools to fund the program. An up-hill battle, initiative proponents need 700,000 signatures to place the proposal on the ballot in 1996. In his 1996 State of the State address, Governor Pete Wilson put forth a school choice proposal, targeted to the lowest 5% of school districts, as measured by achievement. The state Superintendent, Delaine Eastin, who threatened a law suit over the matter, said, "it's the same old shell game. If you simply give kids a voucher for any private school, charlatans will open all kinds of private schools."

- **Unions:** The California Teachers Association has begun to levy an annual $3.8 million from its members to fight school choice and to promote a sale tax increase for more school funds. Unions continue to block most of Governor Wilson's and legislators' education reforms, including efforts to expand families' school choices, to rewrite the state's stifling 11-volume education code, to repeal tenure provisions, and to implement merit pay and alternative certification programs for teachers.

  Reformers are making inroads on the hold the union has on the state's education bureaucracy. In November, 1994, many union-backed candidates for school board were defeated, a commonplace occurrence in elections in 1995.

- **Standards and Assessments:** In the wake of disastrously low test scores for the state's fourth graders, legislators have passed an "ABC bill" that mandates the use of textbooks that reinforce phonics and spelling. Last September, a state task force found that the whole language system introduced in the late 80s was leaving students without fundamental reading skills. In an effort to improve both governance and achievement, the Education Commission of the States released recommendations in March that the state set higher student achievement standards, but give districts the responsibility of determining how to reach them. In September Superintendent Eastin announced her own plan for local control by allowing districts to become "challenge" districts held to high standards but released from burdensome regulations and mandates. Governor Wilson became critical of Goals 2000, but has chosen to remain in the program.

- **Decentralization:** In another bid to strengthen local control, lawmakers passed a broad bipartisan measure to facilitate the break-up of the sprawling Los Angeles Unified School District by enabling fewer voters to launch such an initiative. And following a national trend, Long Beach Unified School District has taken advantage of a state option to implement uniform requirements for elementary students. Officials report crime and student suspensions are down, and parental involvement and attendance are up.

- **Private Scholarships:** In Oakland, California, the Children's Educational Opportunities (CEO) Foundation provides partial tuition scholarships to 250 low-income students (2,150 on waiting lists) to attend the school of their choice. In June 1994, the CEO Foundation of Southern California began, helping 775 children in Los Angeles and Orange Counties to attend private schools; more than 5,000 students remain on the waiting list.

COLORADO

- **Charter Schools:** Colorado's Charter Schools Act allows for the creation of up to 50 charter schools, and 27 have been approved to date, including two Core Knowledge schools based on E.D. Hirsch's Cultural Literacy. Thirteen charters are expressly reserved for schools for at-risk children. A 1993 law requiring districts to expel unruly students for up to a year, which effectively doubled some districts' expulsion rates, has created support for additional charters to serve such students. The final recommendations of Governor Roy Romer's commission on charter schools include allowing for the State Board to charter schools, lifting the cap, ensuring that all per-pupil funding follows the child to the charters, and other sound ideas based on experience in Colorado and elsewhere.

- **Standards and Assessments:** The adoption of new state academic standards, or equally rigorous substitutes, will be required of each of the state's 176 school

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districts by January 1997. Fourth and eighth grade assessment tests are being developed to measure students' mastery of reading, writing, math, history, science and geography according to the state standards.

- **Other Choice Issues:** During this past spring's legislative session, reform issues including prohibiting teacher strikes and establishing teacher merit pay died in committee. Currently, Colorado offers public school choice within school districts, and also permits some choice of public schools outside a child's own district. A US District Judge has terminated Denver's 21-year desegregation and forced-busing program, which may open the door to more parental choice and competition among schools. To help parents evaluate their choices, the Independence Institute issues an annual report card for every public school in the state. Educational Options for Children, a private fund in Denver, provides partial-tuition scholarships up to $1,250 to more than 75 children.

CONNECTICUT

- **Legislative Initiatives:** The state has seen choice efforts only narrowly defeated in two consecutive years. As the spring, 1995, legislative session drew to a close, sponsors withdrew a local option school choice proposal that only had a slim majority of support, with the hope of building a stronger base of support for the next session. The bill, which would have permitted local districts to create a school choice program, including private schools for low-income children, was similar to one that lost in a tie vote the previous year. A weak charter school bill also did not pass. School choice enjoys bipartisan support among the state legislators, and Governor John Rowland appointed a "Blue Ribbon Panel" to study the issue and make recommendations by February. A May, 1995, poll showed 81% of voters polled supported the local option bill; recent polls also show strong support for choice. The State Board of Education is interested in bringing about myriad reforms this year.

- **Private Scholarships and Contracting-out Services:** Launched this past summer, CEO Bridgeport provides private scholarships to help 125 children.

Last fall, Education Alternatives, Inc., began operation of six public schools in Hartford. EAI's original contract was for management of all 32 of the district's schools, but the partnership was scaled back under pressure from opponents. The plan met with fierce resistance from the teachers union, which has negotiated some of the most generous contracts in the country for the local teachers and they fear losing control to private providers. After several months of trying to resolve disputes and clarifying contractual relationships, the school board, which is reform-minded, voted with resignation to terminate the contract. This was particularly surprising to some given that the school board majority won re-election last year in a heated race that challenged the union's clout.

- **Other Choice Issues:** In other on-going programs school districts in Connecticut may offer transportation to non-public school students and be reimbursed by the state. New Haven has had a widely publicized magnet school program since 1974 and is credited with good results among low-income children.

DELAWARE

During the state's spring, 1995 legislative session, legislators enacted both a public school choice and a charter school program. The number of charters is limited to five in each of the first three years beginning 1996, after which the cap is lifted. Despite some concessions to the teachers union, charters will have considerable autonomy from state rules, and private entities can apply. Five companies have already lined up to open schools.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

As part of the government appropriations package for DC, the Republican House passed a measure to include a tuition scholarship program for DC. The proposal was set to provide $3,000 scholarships per pupil for families living below the poverty level, and included charter school provisions. The measure was sent to conference committee to be reconciled with the Senate's appropriation package. As of this writing, a modified measure that gives the District the option of implementing the scholarship program has been approved by the conference committee, and is scheduled for a Senate vote on February 27.

Both Washington, DC, School Superintendent Franklin Smith and Mayor Marion Barry have given tacit support to choice, and the DC Board of Education approved private contracting of instructional and management services to allow schools to be operated by private organizations, universities and professional organizations, on a case by case basis. Beginning in the 1996-1997 school year, individual schools may petition the board to enter into such contracts. The district already uses the private sector to provide meaningful options to about 1,000 children.

Several so-called charter schools did open in the District this fall, approved by the DC Board of Education, but with little autonomy over personnel. The School Board passed its own charter bill, which is weak. Approval of the DC Appropriations bill that contains a strong charter measure would supersede the DC bill.

The Washington Scholarship Fund currently provides over 180 half-tuition scholarships, up to $1,500, to low-income children in the District to choose to attend a private school. Private business leaders are hoping to establish a similar program that would pair businesses with at-risk students and provide full

scholarships now, and make a commitment to college through the nationally recognized I Have A Dream program.

FLORIDA

Beginning with his election last fall, Florida's State Education Commissioner Frank Brogan has broken the mold of state superintendents. Brogan supports extensive reform of the education system, including expanding educational alternatives through greater choice and charters, rolling back regulations, and linking program funding to accountability. A charter bill was passed by both legislative houses in 1995, but lawmakers failed to reconcile those bills in conference, and Governor Lawton Chiles vetoed a funding measure. Just this January, however, the Senate education committee speedily passed a charter measure, and by gaining bi-partisan support and the Governor's commitment, the legislature is soon likely to permit charters. Brogan has also reduced the bureaucracy, and in an attempt to refocus dollars on the classroom, 5% of the state's administrative budget must now be redirected toward instructional uses.

Interest in bringing choice to the state is high. A recent informal survey by the Orlando Sentinel showed over 75% of the 6,000 respondents support full school choice. On the back of this support Representative Steve Wise continues to gather support for his "K-12 Tuition Assistance Pilot Program" bill; he is planning to introduce the proposal in 1996, and two other proposals, targeted to at-risk children, are slated for action. The legislature reconvenes March 5, 1996.

Every year more than 25,000 high school seniors take advantage of the state's post-secondary enrollment option. CEO Central Florida began in 1994 to provide scholarships to 200 low-income children in Orlando to attend private schools.

In 1991 Miami school officials set precedent by contracting with Education Alternatives, Inc. to set up and manage schools. However, the county did not renew the contract, saying they had accomplished what they set out to do. However, the New York-based Edison project has signed a contract to operate two schools in Miami in the fall, bringing their education program to over 2000 children there. This brings the number of Edison schools to 6.

GEORGIA

- **Legislative Initiatives:** In 1993 Georgia enacted a weak charter school law with little governing autonomy or flexibility in staffing. It is only available to existing public schools. Legislators tinkered with the law last year, but made no substantive changes. Only three charters are now in operation. To encourage the formation of schools, the state has given ten $5,000 grants for 'charters' this fall. In independent efforts, the Bibb County district has become the state's first to solicit bids for private management of the school's food services.

- **New Superintendent:** Georgia joined with several other states in turning to new education leadership with the election in November, 1994 of Linda Shrenko, a former public school teacher, as the new superintendent of public instruction. Shrenko confounded the establishment by defeating the union-backed incumbent with a campaign outlay of only $20,000; she is now implementing plans to cut at least $3 million from her department's budget, and to reroute some employees to work in the field, hands-on with the schools. Shrenko has also taken a lead in refusing to sign an agreement with the US Department of Education to govern the state's Goals 2000 funding. Shrenko was the first to withdraw from the Council of Chief State School Officers, a national association for superintendents, because it failed to represent her education reform agenda.

- **Private Scholarships:** Through other programs, the Peachtree state currently provides education grants for children and students in private pre-kindergarten programs, colleges and graduate schools, including those at secular institutions. More the 60,000 Georgia students have received HOPE scholarships to attend college, and Governor Zell Miller intends to remove income restrictions to make the funds available to all residents. In K-12 activity, the Children's Education Foundation, a private scholarship program in Atlanta, provides half-tuition scholarship up to $3,000 to help 200 children attend their school of choice.

- **Vouchers:** Minority parents dissatisfied with their poor public-school options hoped to revive a 1961 private school vouchers law originally designed for white parents to get around desegregation laws, but a lawsuit filed in 1994 by the Southeastern Legal Foundation on their behalf was dismissed. A parallel effort, sponsored in the legislature in 1994, never made it out of committee.

HAWAII

Hawaii has a weak charter school law that brings few new options to the state's single district. Only one charter school has opened so far.

IDAHO

Governor Phil Batt is looking to crack down on public school spending and get tax dollars out of the central administration and into classrooms. During the spring, 1995 session, charter schools, although unanimously endorsed by the House Education Committee, were defeated on the floor in the wake of opposition from the PTA and the Idaho Association of Administrators. Efforts to change the state panel for Goals 2000 funding was won by Superintendent Anne Fox with support from the Governor. Fox had been overruled by the former Board earlier in the year when she moved to reject the federal funds entirely. Fox also supports choice that includes private schools, but brought no bill

forward this session. In July, state Attorney General Al Lance gave a constitutional nod to a tuition tax credit initiative that the Idaho Citizens Alliance is working to put before voters within the next few years. Idaho currently has public school choice.

ILLINOIS

A pilot school choice bill for low-income Chicago families was deferred for further consideration after passage in the Senate last year. The bill is still alive for consideration this year. And although a weak charter bill was passed by both houses, the conference committee could not reconcile the two bills for final passage. Governor Jim Edgar led the enactment of a state waiver bill to give districts greater flexibility, but was not supportive of the choice bill.

In Chicago, authority was given to Democratic Mayor Richard Daley to disband and replace the school board with his own five-member School Reform Board of Trustees, with the mandate to get schools back up to par and weed out district corruption. Waste and over-charging in the school system are estimated to cost the city's taxpayers $40 million annually. Other new legislation affecting the city gives principals a broader hand in running their campuses, including personnel issues, and forbids the Chicago Teachers Union from bargaining on matters unrelated to teachers benefits, including contracting-out, school planning and curriculum. Daley has four years to turn around the city's schools and central office; so far he has cut $240 million from the school budget, reduced administrative staff by 13 percent, and turned to private contractors for custodial services. The board wants to end the city's desegregation program which costs $40 million annually for a system that's 89 percent minority. Achievement goals include boosting the city's student test scores to the national average, reducing truancy by two-thirds, and halving the 52 percent dropout rate.

A private company, Sylvan Learning Centers Inc., that has demonstrated success in providing remedial education to disadvantaged students, signed a contract last fall to teach children in 11 of Chicago's schools. In addition, Chicago is one of several big cities that has received money from the Annenberg Challenge, to help improve schools. The process, however, is embroiled in infighting among education groups, and no firm progress has been made.

INDIANA

- **Charter Schools:** A legislative committee considered charter schools, but given the union's presence on the board, were unable to build consensus for a plan; lawmakers plan to introduce a new bill to the General Assembly this year. The 1995 reform package allowed for greater school flexibility and local control. The "freeway schools" plan permits local school boards to waive regulations on

issues from personnel to textbooks to curriculum. Several school choice bills, including one geared to low-income students in Indianapolis, made it through committee but failed in the General Assembly.

- **Open Enrollment:** Currently, parents choose their child's elementary or middle school in each of Indianapolis' three districts, and their child's high school from among the city's seven high schools. Indianapolis Mayor Steve Goldsmith (who's running for Governor), a champion of full school choice, won legislative approval for an initiative that gives the school board greater leverage in bargaining with the unions, paves the way for a merit pay system, and makes provisions for closing down failing schools.

- **Private Scholarships:** In 1991, Golden Rule Insurance Company, based in Illinois, sparked the national trend for private scholarship programs with the creation of the CHOICE Charitable Trust. The program helps low-income children in Indianapolis attend the private school of their choice by providing them scholarships of up to half of tuition costs. Now in its fifth year, the program serves over 1,000 children. The state provides financial assistance, in the form of transportation, to some children who attend private and parochial schools, as well as provides textbook funding for low-income children.

IOWA

As one of the first states to give children unrestricted choice among all public schools in the state, Iowa now has about 11,000 students using open enrollment, up from 1,700 in 1990. Currently, parents can receive a tax deduction on private school tuition of their children, but some Iowa lawmakers wish to change it to a tax credit and to increase the amount.

In recent years, charter school bills have not made it past the committee level. Recent changes allow districts and individual schools to petition the state for regulation waivers, but few have acted on this provision. A few districts contract with private institutions to educate at-risk students, but placements are generally at the discretion of the court or the school, rather than the parents.

KANSAS

The legislature enacted a 'charter school' law last year, but it is so restrictive that it offers no options for autonomy or innovation. No charters are currently proposed or operating; however, there is interest in improving the law. Under a contract with the Wichita Public School District, last fall the Edison Project began operating the Dodge Elementary School. The students are mostly from low-income families; 1,200 students applied for last year's 610 spaces.

KENTUCKY

A 1990 law that redesigned the state's education system gives parents limited authority to remove their children from a public school determined to be "in crisis." Its main focus, however, is school accountability. The law was enacted after the Kentucky Supreme Court ruled that the state's entire system of public education was unconstitutional. The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) has spurred a number of reforms, including cash incentives for schools that reach performance goals, but the testing system upon which the awards are based is said to be highly flawed. KERA has garnered mixed reviews from grassroots organizations who report that it funnels more money into schools with little results to show for it. In addition, the new assessment system is reportedly low on rigorous standards, yet the state does report some achievement gains.

The state currently provides $4 million for transportation assistance to non-public school students.

LOUISIANA

Louisiana now joins the growing list of states that have relatively strong charter laws. Up to eight districts are permitted to start an unlimited number of charter schools. The districts may operate the charters themselves, or grant them to private groups. The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, which picks the participating districts, has already fielded interest from at least ten different parishes, and has indicated that schools could open by this fall. Two professional organizations, the Association of Professional Educators in Louisiana (APEL) and the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, have been vocal supporters of charter schools from the outset. The state applied for a $1.2 million federal grant to plan and implement the new law.

Newly-elected Governor Mike Foster, a reformer, campaigned for reorganizing the state's education system, including abolishing the State Board. His transition team is working on his education proposals, which are likely to include further decentralization and governance concepts.

MAINE

Representative Al Barth is targeting this legislative session to introduce a charter school bill. Several Democrats switched parties in December, thus giving Republicans majority control of the newly constituted committees. This is a boon to charter supporters, who in this state, tend to be Republican. Senator Phil Harriman, supporter of several unsuccessful school choice efforts, plans to reintroduce legislation this spring. The Maine Educational Choice Coalition, in

conjunction with other parent and taxpayer groups, is working to restore local control and bring parental choice to the state's education system.

MARYLAND

The Baltimore City School District in the middle of its second year of a contract for the management of nine schools with the private Education Alternatives, Inc. (EAI) terminated the contract, citing dire financial straits. The Mayor, facing a $32 million budgetary shortfall, attempted to cut EAI's $44 million operating budget by $7 million. EAI was willing to take the hit, but when the district could not promise reimbursement at a later time -- the contract was ended.

At the time, EAI could also not point to any increased achievement gains. Since then, however, Maryland officials released statewide test scores and 88% of the EAI schools showed gains in student achievement in the 1995 Maryland State Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), compared to 63% of the schools throughout the Baltimore City Public Schools. EAI had been under intense scrutiny from the beginning, even though EAI had introduced new technology and improved the physical plant of its schools. The local branch of the American Federation of Teachers continually attacked the company for its hiring of college students as teachers aides in lieu of higher paid para-professionals. Regardless of the achievement records, experts agree that given the students' high mobility rates and the short period EAI had to run the schools, it's too soon to tell how the students, and such programs are doing. Many, however, reported high satisfaction, and EAI said that its daily attendance rate was markedly higher.

There is some possibility that legislators will raise the issue of charter schools during this legislative session.

MASSACHUSETTS

- **Charter Schools:** In September, 1995, the state's first 15 charter schools officially opened their doors, enrolling about 2,600 students. The schools, each of which receives $10,000 in supplemental start-up funds, include a school for drop outs run by a community college, and a back-to-basics school founded by parents. The Renaissance School in Boston, which uses the design and curriculum of the Edison Project, opened with 630 students chosen by lottery from 2,000 applications. Most recently, the international SABIS School Network, a private educational firm, contracted with the district of Springfield to run one of its elementary schools as a charter. Under the law, 25 charters can be awarded, and 21 have been granted to date; five of those are expected to open this fall. In response to the first charter schools opening, Boston launched an experiment creating six pilot schools that operate outside the control of the districts bureaucracy, and has since shown interest in expanding the program. The

unions have agreed to work with the pilot schools and allow them to hire without regard for seniority or district boundaries. The mayor received authority to appoint the school board to make the city's education more directly accountable to taxpayers, but little can be evaluated at this point.

- **Open Enrollment:** A 1991 Massachusetts law permits students to attend public school in districts other than their own unless the receiving district declines to participate. The program began operation in September, 1991. By December, 1993, 4,200 students used inter-district choice, up from 3,200 for 1992-1993 and 1,000 in 1991-1992. A survey conducted by the Massachusetts Office of Education found that 92% of those surveyed were most or very satisfied with their school of choice. All of Boston's 60,000 students participate in the city's controlled choice plan.

- **The Governor's New Proposal:** This fall Governor William Weld moved to consolidate all the education authorities in the state under a "super board", and hired ex-political rival and Boston University President John Silber to serve at the helm, replacing the current state board chairman. As the unpaid chairman of the Board of Education, Silber will oversee education from preschool through high school, and adult education. Weld recently proposed sweeping reforms, such as expanding the state's successful charter law, compelling higher standards, instituting a statewide public school choice program and providing private options for low-income students. Silber has not endorsed all of these measures.

MICHIGAN

- **Legislative Initiatives:** Michigan is among the most active states in reform. At the end of the 1995 fall session, the legislature enacted a rewrite of the state's education code, which remands authority for curriculum standards to the local level, relieves districts of some of the regulatory burden imposed by the state, and changes the number of charters permitted to 25 a year, until 2000, when the cap will be lifted altogether. While a bill was proposed, and hotly debated, to provide public school choice, disagreement about students crossing district lines and funding responsibility threw the lawmakers into gridlock over the issue.

  Over a year ago, Governor John Engler enacted a revamping of the school finance system, and significant changes to the striking power of unions and staying power of employment bargaining rights.

- **Charter Schools:** Michigan's charter school law, passed in December, 1993, allowed an unlimited number of public school academies, as they are called, to be established. Forty-five academies will be up and running by the end of the 1995-1996 year. The state's first charter school actually opened in the heart of Detroit before legislation was passed, and had 5,000 applications for 350 spots, perhaps not surprising in a city where public school graduation rate is less than 30%.

Charter schools, however, have not been without obstacles and detractors. In 1994, shortly after the opening of the state's first charters, a Circuit Court judge struck down the charter law, ruling that charter schools didn't qualify as public schools for funding. Nonetheless , legislators came through with eleventh-hour stop-gap funding and refashioned the law to comply with the court's ruling. The Michigan Teachers Union, as well as a district superintendent, have threatened several charter-sponsoring universities by demanding they discontinue their charter involvement or face having their education schools blackballed by the district and the union. Despite the threats, by July, 1995, one of the union-targeted universities, Central Michigan University, had already sponsored 38 schools to serve about 5,500 students, and is currently reviewing at least 20 more applications. University-sponsored charters are currently limited to 75, but the new law expands the limit to 150, albeit 25 a year until 1998.

To support charter schools, the State Board of Education is coordinating with the Michigan Partnership for New Education to provide public relations and technical and financial assistance to new and potential charter schools.

- **School Finance:** Governor Engler's 1993 school finance effort resulted in the abolition of property taxes, which provided two-third of the state's school funding, as a means of forcing reorganization of the schools' finance system. The public voted in 1994 to increase state sales taxes, and the state, not districts, now provides the bulk of school funds and distributes it among the state's districts.

- **Private Contracting:** Efforts at private contracting have had their ups and downs. After Pinckney board members began to look into bringing EAI into its schools, union opponents sounded the alarm and succeeded in placing two of their own candidates on the school board, overturning the board's reform majority. At the same time, a public school in Mount Clemens has successfully contracted to have the Edison Project operate one of its schools. To give more low-income children a choice of schools, two separate private organizations award over 275 partial-tuition scholarships to families in Grand Rapids and in Battle Creek.

- **Unions:** The Michigan Education Association, opposed to the aforementioned efforts, launched an $8 million, three year, public relations campaign to try to polish their tarnished image, financed by a $30 hike in union dues.

In addition, the union continues to fight the 1994 law that levies fines on strikers, which are illegal in the state; there have been none since 1995.

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MINNESOTA

Minnesota in many ways has led the school reform movement in the states. It was the first to enact a charter law, the first to enact statewide open enrollment, the first to establish a post-secondary enrollment option, and the first to forge contracts between a school district and a private firm for district management.

Over 15% of all students now take advantage of any one of the state's many public school choice opportunities. Various alternative school programs are chosen by thousands of students and dropouts each year. And as a result of the competition from universities that enroll upperclassmen, high schools have quadrupled the number of advanced placement courses they offer. One of the most expansive forms of public school choice -- charter schools -- came to the state in 1991, and 17 charter schools now operate in the state, with up to 40 allowed by law, three of which may be started by universities. On the entrepreneurial side, public-private partnerships are both popular and successful in the state. Through the High School Graduation Incentives Program, school districts contract with private, non-profit alternative education programs to enroll eligible at-risk students from grades K through 12. In 1990-1991, more than 1,000 students attended 20 alternative schools through this program. And in December, 1993, the Minneapolis school board contracted with the company Public Strategies Group to operate the district. PSG's compensation is performance-based, and gets paid only when specific objectives are met.

In late 1995, Governor Arne Carlson proposed introducing new technology into schools, expanding before and after school programs, and creating a modest choice plan for low-income families living in three disadvantaged areas. A grass roots lobby group, Parent Choice Advocates, has just been launched to develop support for the program. Carlson is also a leader in the National Governors Association, and is attempting to bolster other reform minded leaders. Minnesota currently allows households to take a tax deduction for school expenses for children who attend either private or parochial school.

MISSISSIPPI

Governor Kirk Fordice has drafted the PRIME initiative (People's Right to Initiate Model Education), to go on the ballot in 1998. It would allow districts to choose autonomy from state rules, charter schools and permit expanded choice.

To bring school choice to 150 of the most disadvantaged children of this state, CEO of Jackson awards scholarships to low-income families in the area.

MISSOURI

Missouri has long dabbled with limited reform efforts, with little success. In the late 1970s, magnet schools were introduced as a means to voluntarily desegregate the Kansas City schools. But one court-ordered desegregation plan in Kansas City which funneled an additional $36,000 per pupil into the system was recognized as a utter failure when test scores in the district actually dropped in the aftermath of this spending windfall. In a court decision earlier in 1995, inter-district busing for desegregation was discontinued. The State Board of Education proposed 'preferred zones' to expand choices for families in St. Louis and Kansas City, but the intention is to encourage diversity rather than better schools. Currently 14,000 students are bused throughout St. Louis County. However, a 1994 report by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recommended that both cities expand choice for district parents, as well as cut overhead to route more money to the classroom. The report found that 44 percent of education spending in the St. Louis district goes to non-classroom services; the ratio of administrators to schools is nearly 3 to 1.

For the first time, last year all districts in the state will be required to provide individual school report cards to their residents, on everything from test scores, dropout rates and attendance levels to per-pupil costs and teacher and administrator salaries. Missouri also has a weak charter law in place.

MONTANA

Montana received a first year grant for $450,000 from the federal Goals 2000 program; but officials have since withdrawn from the program.

NEBRASKA

This is one of the 16 states to offer open-enrollment. Over 7,000 students attend schools outside their districts.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Under the leadership of freshman State Senator Jim Rubens, a member of the Senate Education Committee, a charter school and open-enrollment law was enacted in spring, 1995 -- the first time such issues had been officially considered by the state's lawmakers. The new charter law allows for charters to be opened by parents, teachers or non-profit organizations. A cap of 35 charters is in place through the year 2000, when it will be lifted. Districts may decide locally to limit the number of children who may participate in either charter schools or the choice program. At this time, the law is mired in the process of writing regulations to carry it out.

New Hampshire is also one of two states that decided to return Goals 2000 funds in order to avoid future compliance with federal mandates. The Governor and the State Board support widespread education reform.

NEW JERSEY

After reaching a standstill in the legislature, Governor Christine Todd Whitman tabled a pilot private school choice program until 1996, and appointed a blue-ribbon commission to study the issue. The panel completed its hearings and has drafted a legislative proposal for consideration, which would allow the Commissioner to target several low-performing, low-income areas and provide students with vouches worth over $3,000. The Governor is likely to introduce a proposal based in part on these recommendations sometime later this year. Polls show widespread support for a choice program, particularly among minorities and poor families.

On January 11, the nation's 20th charter law was enacted, providing for 135 independent public schools to be established, both as new and converted public schools. The law is strong, but suffered union concessions to require collective bargaining in any existing school that converts, and to prohibit private firms from making any profit if they choose to contract with a charter school.

The Governor is also faced with the State Supreme Court's ruling that the current education funding system is inequitable and, therefore, unconstitutional -- despite the fact that New Jersey spends an average of $10,000 per pupil across the state. The Governor has come out in support of developing an early-warning test to establish learning benchmarks and measures for the achievement of the state's fourth graders. Meanwhile, the district of Newark joined Paterson and Jersey City in state receivership, due to a failure to provide its students with even a minimum education. Less than 10% of the Newark's eighth graders and 25% of its eleventh graders score proficiently in the basics. Nevertheless, the New Jersey Education Association last year levied its members $50 so that it could wage a $10 million "Pride in Public Education" campaign.

There are currently a few intra-district choice programs in place. Montclair has a nationally recognized district-wide magnet school program that has boosted student achievement and fostered voluntary racial integration. A 1990 report by the Education Testing Service found between 1984 and 1988, median reading and mathematics scores rose in all grades. The gap between minority and non-minority academic achievement was reduced by almost 30 percent over 4 years.

NEW MEXICO

New Mexico passed restrictive legislation in 1993 to provide for five charter schools and four were launched in fall, 1994. The original sponsor, Representative Robert Perls, hopes to expand the present program to allow more autonomy and remove obstacles in the application process.

NEW YORK

There has been little reform activity in New York as a whole, and New York City remains an embattled education zone. Governor George Pataki remains committed to downsizing that state Department of Education, and possibly disbanding the Board of Regents in favor of an appointed state Board of Education, but he has put off action on this. Former Vermont Education Commissioner Richard Mills is now State Education Commissioner, but his reform efforts remain to be seen.

- **New York City:** Mayor Rudolph Guiliani's fights with city Superintendent Raymond Cortinez led to the superintendent's resignation; the city's Board of Education brought in former Tacoma, WA Superintendent Rudolph Franklin Crew on a pledge to whittle the central bureaucracy. Guiliani hopes, through state legislation, to gain direct control of the city school system's finances and school security, but the new superintendent is reluctant to cede authority, and instead wants to work with the mayor to bring spending and safety in line.

- **Standards and Assessments:** New York City has implemented tougher graduation requirements, including advanced Regent's courses, which are raising the achievement levels of many students; the standards are also creating a measurable challenge to students who formerly had little, although the benchmark is still said to be short of ideal. Nearly 50 alternative public schools of choice have been established, providing an array of moderately better public schools in the city. Choice for all the city's 80,000 high schoolers is available through the wide array of such magnet schools that operate throughout New York City, many on a selective admissions basis.

- **Charter Schools:** The city is using a $50 million Annenberg Foundation partnership grant to develop charter schools, although it is unclear whether truly autonomous, accountable schools will emerge from it without authorizing legislation. Overall, despite some promising programs, wholesale improvements to the system have yet to emerge.

- **Model Schools:** The measurable effects of school choice, however, can be seen in 20 years of progress in one of the city's poorest districts -- East Harlem's District 4. Beginning in 1974, maverick District 4 officials allowed teachers in the junior

high schools to redesign and even create schools, and empowered parents to choose the schools their children would attend -- in essence, the first charter schools. The East Harlem choice program is credited with raising reading scores and lifting the district from last of 32 New York City school districts to the mid range among the city's public schools. The choice plan also has attracted white students to the largely minority school district, creating voluntary desegregation.

- **Private Scholarships:** The Student/Sponsor Partnership, a private scholarship foundation, provides full tuition assistance to 930 students from low-income families to attend parochial schools in New York City. Operation Exodus granted scholarships this past year to over 100 children to attend 40 different schools. Hope through Education assists 100 children in Albany with half-tuition scholarships, and the BISON Fund provides nearly 200 scholarships for low-income children in Buffalo.

NORTH CAROLINA

The Legislature early last year acted to decentralize and passed the School Flexibility and Accountability Act, streamlining purchasing regulations and allowing more flexibility for local funding decisions. The State Board of Education plans to cut department staff by 38 percent, which with other trimmings will yield a $21 million savings. The board also plans to reward high-performing schools while sending in experts to improve poor-performing ones.

The spring legislative session also saw a battle between choice and charter school advocates and the status quo over a tuition tax credit proposed by Rep. Steve Wood, Chairman of the House Education Committee. The bill would have provided a $200 tax credit against parents' tuition costs to send a child to a private school. Both the sitting and former Governors launched a public campaign against the bill, and action on it was put on hold until the spring.

NORTH DAKOTA

The state has some intra- and inter-district choice programs, limited to 20 percent of a district's enrollment; about 900 students currently participate.

OHIO

- **Vouchers:** In June, 1995, Ohio Governor George Voinovich became the first to sign into law a full school choice program that includes religious and parochial schools, slated to begin this fall. Enacted as part of the state' s budget, it will allow nearly 2,000 Cleveland children from low-income families to receive a $2,500 scholarship to attend city public, private or religious schools. Parents pay 10% of the tuition cost (or provide services at the school). Support for the measure was

galvanized by Cleveland Councilwoman Fanny Mae Lewis, who, along with other local minority leaders, lead a march on the Capitol in January to demand school choice for children (The deterioration of Cleveland's public schools had already resulted in a state takeover of the district). Hope for Ohio's Children mobilized grassroots support for the bill. In January, the American Federation of Teachers, the teacher's union, filed suit on constitutional grounds and asked for an injunction against the program's opening pending the final outcome of that case. There is precedent, however: Ohio already provides transportation and textbooks, as well as a $128 cash payment to cover administrative costs, for all children attending non-public schools.

- **Charter Schools:** Last year, Education Chair Senator Cooper Synder introduced SB 331, to provide for a wide variety of charters and sponsors. In the House, State Rep. Sally Perz led the passage through her committee of HS 370, a slightly different but equally good charter bill that would provide for dozens of sponsors and autonomous schools. Hearings have been held and a vote is expected in March. It is likely Ohio will enact strong legislation, after both versions are reconciled.

OKLAHOMA

Not a leader in reform efforts, Oklahoma nonetheless has begun to debate doing what it takes to improve schools. Citizens are still embroiled in a controversial 1993 education reform bill, HB 1017, which increased funding over $300 million a year, and enacted some standards that many questioned. The bill was later amended to take out non-academic aspects. Governor Frank Keating, has limited control over education beyond budgets. However, a Commission is studying the charter issue, and state officials are studying national reform efforts. Senator Don Rubottom is actively involved in promoting school choice in Oklahoma.

OREGON

In 1995, charter school legislation failed by three votes in the House, aided by pressure from the state superintendent and the state school board association. Supporters hope to bring the issue to the voters next year in the form of a ballot initiative, either as referred by the legislature or through signature collection. Although the state has no enabling legislation, federal funds have been granted for the development of charter schools in the state; supporters fear that such funds will be used to create only modest changes in existing schools that give the impression that they are charter, and thus diminish support for passage of a strong charter bill that would create truly innovative schools.

Oregon allows students to earn a tenth grade Certificate of Initial Mastery of basic skills, and thus opt out of their assigned high school into another high

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school in the state, a community college, a vocational or college prep program. The state also allows parents to pull children out who aren't succeeding after a year in any school, and put them in any other public school that will accept them.

PENNSYLVANIA

- **Legislative Initiatives:** An education reform package that would have provided for charter schools, given school boards authority for contracting, and established a modest school choice program was nearly defeated in the House in June, tabled, and later pulled by Governor Tom Ridge for lacking but a few votes for passage. Ridge plans to work on these issues again, possibly in separate efforts. Along with pushing for charter schools, Education Secretary, Eugene Hickok, has undertaken to implement rigorous academic standards. Weak Charter school legislation is being forwarded by the education committee chairmen in the state; many groups are working to strengthen it.

- **Private Contracting:** Located near Pittsburgh, Wilkinsburg became the state's first district to contract formally with a private organization to help bring improvements to its schools. Alternative Public Schools, Inc., of Nashville, Tennessee, was selected competitively to run the very disadvantaged Turner Elementary School. The plan includes hiring new personnel, personalized instruction, the basics, spending more time with the students, and higher standards. Opponents, led by unions, are attempting to shut down the contract through the courts, which so far has ruled the program can continue while it deliberates. Despite such road blocks the school opened its doors in September to 400 eager students and their parents, and the community re-elected the school board handily.

  The state, working with local districts, currently contracts with 30 private schools to educate nearly 3,700 children with special needs, as well as funds 4 "charter schools" which educate approximately 860 deaf and blind students.

- **Other issues:** Showing the muscle of local control, one district's school board has elected not to continue membership in the state's parent school board association, citing that organization's entrenched opposition to the Governor's reform stance (Another also voted to disassociate from the PSBA, but later reversed its vote under pressure from its own members and the PSBA president). In a similar move, Secretary Hickok canceled his membership with the Council of Chief State School Officers, rejecting their federal lobbying efforts as at cross purposes with his push for reform and local control.

RHODE ISLAND

The Pawtucket School Committee rejected the state's desegregation plan in favor of one giving parents a choice to send their child to a school other than their assigned school. And in Providence, the superintendent has implemented school report cards to inspire "friendly competition" in the district. Parents will have access to test scores, attendance rates and other information indicative of a school's performance. Rhode Island was the site of two teacher strikes this fall, despite being illegal, and despite the fact that, in a state where most wages and salaries are below the national average, its teachers' salaries rank in the top fifth of teachers nationwide.

Last spring, the legislature enacted a charter school law, but it provides little autonomy or flexibility regarding who may set up charters and how they are run.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Governor David Beasley has pledged to cut red tape and decentralize the system in an effort to get the public's tax dollars out of the hands of bureaucrats and into the individual schools. The Governor has challenged the unions to reject the poor performance of the status quo and instead consider full school choice.

Grass roots groups mobilized the support of business leaders, parents and community members to bring school choice to the state. They have drawn up a measure for poor families which enjoys widespread support but which has not been acted upon. Three intra-district pilot projects were welcomed in 1994. A study of one of the district's choice programs, which won the vocal support of the local superintendent, showed that 10% of the eligible students participated, and the program actually resulted in better integrated high schools.

SOUTH DAKOTA

In 1995 the South Dakota legislature passed numerous laws eliminating nearly half of the state's encumbering school regulations.

TENNESSEE

Twenty-two thousand students participated in an inter-district choice program in Mufreesboro, Tennessee, a district that has also been largely successful with a rigorous district standards effort. Last fall, CEO Knoxville began distributing scholarships to low-income families to help them send their children to the school of their choice.

TEXAS

- **Legislative Initiatives:** The spring 1995 legislative session played host to a substantial rewrite to the Texas education code. Local control was a major goal: a concept called Home Rule, championed by Governor George W. Bush, allows districts, with referendum approval, to operate more autonomously from the state; whereas a new charter schools program allows for a majority of teachers and parents to charter their school. Up to 20 charters may be granted by the State Board of Education, and local boards may also grant charter status. Houston principal Thaddeus Lot will be one of the first to direct a cluster of autonomous schools under the new law, although his authority will be limited to personnel and curriculum. Home Rule districts, created by referenda, will take longer to be established. Meanwhile, The Sherman Texas School district contracted with the Edison Project to run one of its elementary schools beginning last August.

  Other provisions that return control to the community include broadened and more explicit rights for parental involvement, as well as a new provision that allows school boards to grant teaching certificates to non-certified teachers, allowing them to place qualified professionals more easily into harder-to-fill slots like science, math and languages. In addition, schools have gained more budgetary and instructional discretion in purchasing equipment and textbooks.

- **Public Choice:** To expand opportunities for some of the state's most at-risk students, the legislature also created "public education grants" for students in low-performing or low-testing schools to attend another school in their or a neighboring district. Based on recent test scores, students in up to 1,000 schools could qualify. However, many districts, not bound by law to accept grant students, are closing their doors to out-of-district transfers, citing over-crowding.

- **School Choice:** Lawmakers battled to enact a modest school choice program for low-income students, but were defeated in a 83-63 vote in the House. Even though a similar pilot program was passed by the Senate 28-2, the Joint Education Committee stonewalled the inclusion of any choice program in the final education code. A similar school choice proposal failed by only two votes in 1992, but reformer Representative Kent Grusendorf intends to bring a new bill to the legislature in the next session, following next November's elections.

- **Private Scholarships:** A private group, Children's Educational Opportunities (CEO) Foundation, provides half tuition of about $1,000 to over 1,500 children attending over 100 schools in five cities throughout Texas. An additional 2,600 children from low-income families are on waiting lists.

UTAH

Utah is one of the sixteen states that provides for public school choice across the state, and is among the top performing states in the nation. A legislative task force commissioned with investigating ways to increase parental involvement includes in its suggestions for legislation a voucher provision.

VERMONT

Since 1869, Vermont has provided vouchers to children whose towns do not have public schools. It began because some towns in this state had formal schools, while many others did not. Under the system, communities with no schools give parents vouchers to permit them to send their children to public and private schools in or outside of the state.

During the spring session, Senators approved a charter school bill for the state.

VIRGINIA

Virginia has achieved one of the best efforts to require high academic standards for all school children. The state's "standards of learning" initially came under attack as too challenging for students, but consensus was finally reached and the standards delineate student achievement from kindergarten through 12th-grade for math, science, social studies, and English, although social studies standards have been surrounded by controversy over content. Governor George Allen has proposed to make the standards mandatory, while leaving curriculum decisions to each school. Legislation has been proposed to develop testing for the standards. The Governor's Commission on Champion Schools has also recommended individual school report cards to inform citizens about specific school performance, for which the state tests could eventually by used.

Earlier this past year, the Governor and Republican leaders pushed a charter school bill, but were roadblocked by partisan bickering. The Governor also declined to participate in the federal Goals 2000 program, making Virginia one of only four states turning down the federal funds.

A suit brought by the several school boards and superintendents has charged the state with disparities in education funding. It was originally thrown out of court, but the Virginia Education Association is pursuing an appeal.

- **Governor's Legislative Agenda:** Gov. Allen's Commission on Champion Schools has urged him to renew his pledge to provide much needed reform to Virginia's beleaguered schools. Among the Commission's recommendations are: vouchers for public and private school students; charter schools; shutting down poor-performing schools; abolishing life-time tenure for teachers, and

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instead hiring them on short-term contractual basis; allowing a longer school year; and requiring students who fail the new standardized tests to take remedial programs, enroll in summer school or be held back for a year.

- **State Superintendent Bill Bosher, Jr.:** Bosher is also recommending replacing teacher-tenure with short-term contracts and raising teacher standards.

WASHINGTON

A group of Washington residents, working as the Education Excellence Coalition, proposed to turn over every public school in the state to teachers, allow for the creation of new charter schools, and provide families with limited school choice. The EEC collected enough signatures to require the legislature to consider the proposal. The legislature has deferred consideration of the initiative and will place it before the voters in November. However, currently, both houses have crafted charter legislation to respond to the EEC initiative. It is quite possible that they will enact a strong measure to avoid having the initiative, which is far more comprehensive, passed by voters. Recent test scores that show that barely half the state's eleventh grades are proficient in any one of the core subjects: math, science, English and history. Only 29% were proficient in all four subjects. Another signature gathering effort has sent to the legislature a voucher proposal.

Public school choice has existed since September 1991, although details governing the transfers vary from district to district. Nearly 12,000 students enroll in schools outside their own district. Seattle's choice program has become so popular that last year 25% of families did not get their first choice, up from 18% last year. Some Seattle school board members would like to move away from the city's controlled choice plan, which is driven by desegregation issues, in favor of one that would allow for the reemergence of neighborhood schools. The board has already waived racial-balance guidelines for some schools.

A private scholarship program, CEO Seattle, helping up to 100 low-income families is planned for the fall.

WISCONSIN

- **Vouchers:** This past legislative session marked a dramatic expansion of Milwaukee private school voucher plan for low-income children. However, suits challenging the constitutionality of the bill, which extends participation to sectarian schools and increases the number of participating children ten-fold, were filed by the teachers' unions and the state arm of the ACLU, and the court has temporarily halted the expansion program while it considers the suit. Oral arguments are expected to begin on February 27.

The August injunction against the expansion threatened to return to the public school system over 3,000 low-income students who had signed up to attend private school under the new program. However, broad-based coalition of inner-city parents, businesses and legislators responsible for putting in place in this latest program collected private funds and teamed up with participating schools to keep most of those students enrolled in the school of their choice. Under the administration of Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE), a privately funded voucher program launched in 1992 that gives half-tuition choice scholarships to over 2,650 students, nearly 2,000 new choice students have joined their ranks in attending private and parochial school while the issue makes its way through the courts. The original program, which was ushered in by Republican Governor Tommy Thompson and Democratic State Representative Annette 'Polly' Williams in September, 1990, survived similar court challenges, but did not include sectarian schools. The Institute for Justice and Landmark Legal Foundation, whose lawyers successfully argued on behalf of the state's first choice families, as well as Whitewater Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr, on behalf of state, will be defending the law this time around.

The new law, if reinstituted, would boost student eligibility, previously capped at 1,500 low-income students, to 15,000, and increase the number of private schools eligible to participate from the 13 of the original program to over 100. It was precisely because of the restriction on participating schools that there were only 830 students participating in the program in 1994-1995 school year, even though the student eligibility cap was 1,500. Parents in both the private PAVE and the MPS programs report that their children have improved academically and that both parent and child are more involved in and more satisfied with their schools. A recent poll of 1,000 of the city's African-American residents found that 95% support parental choice of school, and 70% favor including parochial schools.

Despite critics' claims that full school choice will siphon off students and funds to the detriment of the school district, recent reports in Milwaukee give evidence to the contrary. Even with the 2,000 new students participating in choice through private donations last year, district student enrollment is up 1,600 over last year, well above projections for the 1995-1996 school year. In addition, three separate reports by city, state and legislative agencies show that full implementation of the new school choice law would actually save the district money, and could increase available funds by as much as $900 per student.

In addition to expanding full choice, new laws allow school districts wider latitude in deciding how they deliver education services: school boards can opt to contract with professional educators outside the scope of district contracts, as well as directly with private educational service providers. In addition, the state currently allows school districts to contract with private schools to educate some of their at-risk students. Districts provide at least 80% of their average per pupil

spending for students eligible for such programs. During the 1992-1993 school year, over 1,000 Milwaukee students were enrolled in these alternative schools.

- **Charter Schools:** In 1993 Wisconsin passed a law to establish ten charter school districts, with up to two schools in each district. However, the schools are still bound somewhat by union contracts and approved by local school boards and thus cannot operate completely free from mandates and regulations. Given the restrictions, response has been slow, and Madison only approved its second charter, an alternative program co-op for struggling students, in June 1995. In the spring legislative session, the two-charter cap was lifted, except for Milwaukee where charter school employees are still subject to collective bargaining.

The new reform bill also creates a new department responsible for education, with a governor-appointed commissioner and 11-member board. The elected state superintendency is provided for by the state Constitution and will remain, but the position will be void of any authority. The move was challenged in court, and an injunction barring the Governor from this action has been approved pending final court action.

WYOMING

State lawmakers passed a so-called charter school bill last year, but the law gives charter schools little freedom from state laws or district oversight.

PUERTO RICO

In September, 1993, Puerto Rico passed legislation allowing children to attend the school of their choice, public, private or parochial. However, following a suit filed by the teachers union in 1994, the commonwealth's Supreme Court declared the section of the program extending to private schools unconstitutional. An appeal by the Washington-based Institute for Justice on behalf of low-income parents was unsuccessful. However, this year the legislature enacted a law to create a private and corporately-funded foundation to administer a full choice program (in the original program, only 12% of the participants chose to attend a private school, and an equal number chose to transfer out of private schools into another public school). Participation in the entire choice program increased ten-fold in the first year, from about 1,600 in 1993, to 16,889 in 1994. Fifteen-thousand of those were children taking advantage of the public school choice option, and that part of the law remains in effect. The legislation also allows for the creation of community schools, which have the autonomy, flexibility and creativity associated with US charter schools.

*** The Center for Education Reform has detailed information about each of these state reform efforts, and can put you in touch with local-level experts and activists. A full list of state and local organizations generating this activity is also available as an appendix in ***The School Reform Handbook, How to Improve Your Schools*** ($9.95), published by the Center. If you would like additional information on any of the topics in this summary, please call us at (800) 521-2118 or write to us at 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 204, Washington, DC, 20036.

This summary is published for the benefit of the general public. We thank all of those who provide us with ongoing information which allows us to update this publication during the year. Many other groups also publish comparisons of state education efforts. This guide was compiled, written and edited entirely by the staff of the Center for Education Reform.***